Navigate With Extreme Prejudice
(Definitions and Ramifications)

Reza Negarestani

• Traditionally, philosophy is an ascetic cognitive experimentation in abstract (general) intelligence. As an ascesis in cognition, it concerns with grasping the mind in terms of a diversifiable set of abilities or practices whose deployment counts as what the mind is and what it does: special doings that one must undertake in order to count as organizing the intellect and setting in motion the faculty of thinking. By abstracting the mind to a set of practices, philosophy experiments with possibilities occasioned by decomposing the behavior of the mind into special performances or practices. The opportunities brought about by this practical decomposability are numerous and are still largely unidentified. The schema of this functionalist abstraction has at least two immediate implications. One is that by decomposing the mind to a set of practices, philosophy is able to envision itself as a veritable environment for an *augmented nous* precisely in the sense of a systematic experiment in mind simulation. Therefore, the mind is conceived - less in the sense of what it is and more in the sense what it does and what it can do - beyond its immediate or hard constraints. In other words, philosophy simultaneously expands the scope of experimentation with the mind and the scope of what mind can be and what it can do. The other implication is that by decomposing the mind into a set of practices, philosophy progressively registers itself as the domain of practical wisdom rather than theoretical wisdom, where 'mind as a theoretical object' is replaced by 'mind as a system of practices'. Already pregnant of pragmatic-functionalist and social-communal gestures, the practical decomposability of mind, accordingly, transforms philosophy into a domain of practical wisdom and by so doing, it allows the understanding and manipulation of the mind as a collective enterprise of robust social practices. Once mind is mapped on the level of social practices, manipulation of the social fabric in the sense of diversifying robust social practices, design of new social conducts and administration of social organizations leads to the constructive manipulation, or more precisely, practical abstraction of

the mind as a collective horizon. Indeed, philosophy establishes a link between intelligence and modes of collectivization, in a way that liberation, organization and complexification of the latter implies new odysseys for the former, which is to say, intelligence and the evolution of the nous. In this way, philosophy presents the first collective model of general intelligence according to which 'what intelligence is' and 'how it can be liberated' are no longer exclusively sought in the workings of the mind as a strongly structurally-coupled entity. In other words, its embedding in materiality (i.e. embodiment) and natural design (i.e. optimization principles associated with natural evolution) are no longer adequate criteria for its identification and liberation. Instead the reality of intelligence (what it is and what it can be) is found in the strongly functional realm of 'mind as a system of collective practices' which, by virtue of the function's autonomy with regard to conditions of its constitution, is capable of proliferating itself in new complex structures and organizations. It is the collective instantiation inherent to this model that provides intelligence with a certain plasticity that can be modified, distributed, facilitated, even expedited. To sum up, by concurrently treating the mind as a vector of extreme abstraction and abstracting the mind into a set of social practices and conducts, philosophy gesticulates toward a particular and not yet fully comprehended event in the modern epoch - as opposed to traditional forms - of intelligence: The self-realization of intelligence coincides and is implicitly linked with the self-realization of social collectivity. The single most significant historical objective is then postulated as the activation and elaboration of this link between the two aforementioned dimensions of self-realization as ultimately one unified project.

• In the broadest sense, philosophy is at once a rigorous program of abstraction and a platform for autonomous deployment of discursive practices whose mission is to arrive at, or more accurately, making sense of what came to be known to Greeks as logoi or truths. The aim of philosophy is entering the game of truths and developing a necessary game-bias (being true to the game). But this is not a game in the sense of playfulness and adhering to a whim. It is a game insofar as it is a rule-based exercise without a referee in which rules can be revised through communal assessment. Reason is simply a name for the space of these rules which are neither natural laws nor socio-cultural conventions. The procedural activity of following, assessing and navigating spaces of these ruled-based practices is called reasoning. By systematically acknowledging and following these rules, one fulfills the first condition for the possibility of freedom and self-realization. The functional autonomy - which should not be mistaken for structural sovereignty or ahistorical genesis - of these inferential rules creates a compulsive and transformative environment that substitutes the impulsion arising from being bound to natural laws with the compulsion inherent to following rules and navigating their spaces. This environment should be regarded as an enabling

condition since prioritizing the functional autonomy of rules allows modes of behavior, organization, navigation and thinking which are not dictated by impulsions nor are decided by any privileged or conserved frame of reference anchored in the order of here and now. This is in fact the very idea of procedurality as the change of both the subject and its perspectives according to the functional autonomy of rules - that is, in compliance with how rules and their spaces evolve according to their logic and their own needs. Once the space of rule is put before oneself and its functional autonomy as a compulsive and transformative environment is acknowledged, it is possible for oneself, the collective or even humanity to become something other what it currently identifies itself with. The space of rule not only exercises a radical revision of views and behaviors but also demands a constructive adaptation to the revisionary force of the rule. Since functional autonomy already implies a self-actualization of the space of rules or reason according to its own needs and reality, in taking notice of these demands and satisfying them, the transformative trajectory of one's self or humanity in general is governed, shaped and realized by the self-actualization of reason itself. By entering the rule-based game of truths and adopting the relation between inference and truth as its backbone, philosophy takes shape as a project whose telos lies in the functional autonomy and respectively, the self-actualizing propensity of reason - a scenario wherein reason liberates its own spaces in spite of what appears to be naturally necessary or the case.

• According to the above definition, the first task of philosophy is to locate an access or a space of entry to the universal landscape of logoi. In short, philosophy's first task is the localization of a site or topos from which logoi can be approached. Localization constitutes the first commitment of philosophy in the game of truths. As a commitment that encapsulates certain choices with regard to progression, orientation, navigation and initial revisable relation to truth, localization also decides later commitments and entitlements (the 'what else?' of an initial commitment). Since in the game of truths, nothing - neither the generic landscape nor a particular place in it - should be taken as a given, localization of a site proper to truth is a matter of a specific form of organization. This organization is conducted by way of a controlled dehomogenization of a homogenous informational landscape (a landscape that neither faces toward the subject nor wants to tell a story) in order to excite a qualitative opportunity and permit further organization. In other words, 'to locate' or 'to determine a place' is a matter of distinguishing, demarcating and organizing a place in an otherwise desert-like landscape where everything seems to be one and the same, and therefore, no move, no navigational commitment toward logoi can be made. Just as in a game where an initial move unravels certain consequences no matter what perturbation its course of evolution undergoes, localization in the sense of an initial commitment unfolds a specific set of collateral

commitments, turning an initial commitment into a gesture that seeds an ever-changing navigational landscape of commitments, their collateral commitments and their ramifications. To set foot in this landscape, to determine a relation to truth, to propose a choice of site is never neutral insofar as it never leaves anything intact. But to exaggerate the choice of topos and the initial decision as an overdetermining factor for the evolution of what happens next (what else, what other commitments and ramifications it provokes) is hardly anything more than an acute myopia. For as soon as a commitment is made, its ramifications - whether as other commitments or other entitlements - grow exponentially. The ramified path structure that an initial commitment opens up is wholly asymmetrical to that commitment. If the navigation of ramified paths always involves decision-making, it does not mean that the initial decision, its conditions and assertional content are preserved throughout the course of navigation. This is but the structure of procedurality as a ramifying space of navigation that inhibits the conservation of decision by organizing collateral commitments and their ramifications into a revisionary force that intercepts any conserved frame of reference or decisional context from the future (of a present commitment). By opening ramified paths and constructing a navigational landscape, localization suggests a radical approach to truth. Rather than asking 'what is truth?, or generally 'what is it?', it asks 'how can truth be approached?', 'where to begin?'. By introducing 'where to begin?' to a landscape whose map is not given, philosophy instigates a discursive chain reaction since the question of *where*, *the topical site* or *the address* which is required for any approach whatsoever breaks down into a series of elementary discursive navigational questions: Where am I? Where have I come from? Where am I heading to? In what path should I proceed?[1] This is a topical decomposability in that the landscape of logoi is captured as a revisable and expandable map of cascading inferential links and discursive pathways between topoi that make sense of truth through navigation. Philosophy then turns out to be a full-blown functionalist discipline. It apprehends the mind as a set of practices which count as the function of the mind, it fathoms truth in terms of a series of topical discursive questions or addressed and rule-based pathways which can subsequently recomposed and synthesized to varieties of maps for different navigational purposes. By tapping into the combined force of practical decomposability of the mind and the topical decomposability of logos, philosophy properly distinguishes itself as a discipline capable of pointing a way in and a way out, with a simple assumption that the two can hardly ever be the same. It can shed light on where we are headed based on the present commitments of humanity and how such commitments ramify. Against any manifest or implicit parochialism, it envisions real alternatives capable of circumventing or overcoming localist blind spots or impeding quandaries since what does an alternative

---

1 See Guerino Mazzola, *The Topos of Music: Geometric Logic of Concepts, Theory, and Performance* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003).

4

address suggest if not the diversifiable synthesis of different pathways and modes of organization of new collective practices? However, the linking between practical and topical decomposability of mind and truth, suggests a far more consequential role for philosophy which is at this point only explicable through certain fuzzy characteristics and vague intimations: This is 'philosophy as the programmatic kernel for the self-realization of intelligence', (1) by pointing in and out of different epochs and activating the navigational links implicit in history; (2) by grasping intelligence as a collective enterprise and hence, drawing a complex continuity between collective self-realization and the self-realization of intelligence as such, in a fashion not dissimilar to the ethical program of an 'all-encompassing self-construction bent on abolishing slavery' articulated by the likes of Confucius, Socrates and Seneca. Assimilated within the project of intelligence, philosophy addresses what it is in the context of what it can be rather than by strictly resorting to its contingently positioned initial conditions or a fundamental definition recovered from the self-reflexive institutional history of philosophy. As a universal laborer of intelligence, the system of philosophy, to appropriate Xiong Shili's dictum[2], is not characterized by its definitional totality which is in itself an illusion but by the integration of its functions, namely, purpose-attaining abilities which progressively escape from the straitjacket of contingently posited constitutions. The only coherent minimal definition of philosophy is one that allows philosophy to keep its pace with intelligence and more than that, provokes its transitions. And insofar as intelligence realizes itself by reconstituting itself, philosophy's systematic and historical endeavor to keep its pace with intelligence means philosophy always reconstitutes what it was supposed to be. It creates a historical anticipation whose effectuation always exceeds and transcends expectation from the point of view of here and now, be it a conservable index of the present rooted in the past or a progressive account of an anchored present directed toward the future. The functional decomposition of 'what is philosophy?' into the discursive and historical question of 'where can philosophy take itself and us?' ramifies into a series of alternatives pathways or addressing maps, navigation of which demand the development of new abilities and in effect, redefining the nature of philosophy and us. The self-conception of philosophy not according to what the concept of philosophy consists of but where this concept subsists in history and in the universal landscape of truth becomes an essential part of philosophy's self-transformation. That is to say, philosophy's special self-conception induces a change in what it is a conception of, in a manner of a diffusive cascade that forever disturbs the static equilibrium - the circle of stagnation - between conception and realization, and generates new transitive spaces between what it is for itself and what it is in itself in a way that an alteration in one provides the other with new choices of disequilibrium or transformative alternatives.

2 See Xiong Shili, *A New Treatise on Consciousness-only* (Taipei: Lianya chubanshe, 1981).

— [Before proceeding any further, it is perhaps beneficial to succinctly clarify 'localization' through an example: Philosophy often commits to different modalities of site or local space of entry to logoi at the same time. It conceives itself as a multi-modal encounter with truth. For example, it conducts its procedures through the topos of the concept (conception), envisions its larger scale impacts through the local terrestrial horizon (geophilosophical commitments) and concretely effectuates itself through the site of the self (ethical commitments). For Chinese, Greeks and Romans, the exercise of freedom and the procedural approach toward logoi were essentially parts of the commitment to the latter i.e. the site of the self. Philosophers ought not to exercise any influence on others unless and until they exercise an administrative care, or more precisely, organization of the self. In order to break free from any mode of slavery whether rooted in impulsions and desires or social and political dominations, philosophers have to care for themselves. Organizing the site of the self in a way that not only leads to the development of new abilities and responsibilities but also protects this site or local relation to logoi from being seized by impulsions and various forms of domination. However, in order to care for themselves, philosophers have to know themselves (know thyself). To know or to identify the truths of themselves, they have to treat themselves as hypotheses, that is to say, fallible or error-tolerant objects of understanding-via-construction and experimentation. Self, accordingly, is revealed to be what is constructed and organized in the process, and nothing else. Therefore, the local site is defined and acted upon without recourse to any foundation, allegedly necessary nature, essential personhood or original identity. Localization qua organization of the self goes as follows: *Care for yourself → Know yourself → Treat and construct yourself as a manipulable hypothesis*. Here the pointers indicate a certain form of decomposability that grants license for constructability, and in this case the design and construction of an advanced agency that is neither necessarily personal nor individual. One set of abilities (various accounts of freedom and subjectification) can be broken into another set of practices (knowing) which can again be elaborated through decomposition to another set of abilities or practices (reciprocally-constructive individual and collective actions). The manipulability that this orientable decomposability permits across different strata of practices or abilities affords ethics a new meaning and a new capacity in the service of intelligence and its self-realization.]

• Localization is the constitutive gesture of conception and the first move in navigating spaces of reason. 'To localize' means 'to conceive' the homogenous and quantitative information into qualitatively well-organized information-spaces endowed with different modalities of access. This qualitative process of 'conceiving' characterizes the labor of conception and links the rational or advanced agency (an agency that behaves according to a representation of a rule and is capable of elaborating between believing true and making true) to logoi. The navigable link between the

rational agency and logoi through spaces of reason marks the horizon of knowledge. Just as the concept is a qualitatively well-organized information-space, a local site, furnished with different modalities of access, knowledge is a system of navigation of concept-spaces endowed with a universal orientation. Respectively, the ontology of the concept is geometrically and topologically defined by its place, its immersed and diversely approachable local situation in the space of navigation or knowledge. To know is to conform to rules of navigation on concept-spaces. Accordingly, knowing is a compulsion which is no longer natural but normative. It depicts a certain form of deportment arising not from conformity to natural laws but from conformity to representation of rational norms and their demands. Whilst the former describes what natural impulsions are, the latter typifies conceptual compulsion as the drive of knowledge. This is a form of compulsion that is error-tolerant, orientational and revisionary, that is to say, capable of revising itself. It is the revisionary vector - supported by error-tolerant norms and various navigational strategies - that turns rationality into a perpetual struggle that presents itself as the veritable model of freedom, a constructive practice of maintaining and enhancing liberty through normative constraints. Freedom then becomes a responsibility to do something rather than a register of deliverance from responsibilities and their constraints; it is posited as co-extensive with a purpose that requires orientations, courses of action, navigational strategies and judgments on different pathways. In line with the universality of logoi, knowledge must also maintain a universal orientation within the plastic bounds of reason. Indeed the universal orientation of knowledge as a system of navigation demands devising customized strategies for synthesizing particular and generic instances, oscillating between local-to-global and global-to-local spaces and bringing conceptual maps with different elevations into a supple coherence. It is forbidden to regard the behavior of the concept as always identical, flatten the status of different concepts (relativize them) and mix up various extensions or maps of the concept with one another. The local site of knowledge cannot be overextended to the universal landscape of logoi (dogmas - whether conceptual or metaphysical - are mostly expressions of inflating or over-extending the local to the global). Nor can different local sites or conceptual maps be stretched or simply added to one another in a pluralistic fashion (the risk of conceptual conflation, trivialization and anti-universality). Different strategies of navigation and integration of conceptual maps are required in order to maintain a universal orientation and non-trivially participate in the game of truths.

• Realized by different strategies of navigation, the universal orientation presents knowledge and by extension philosophy as platforms for breaking free from the supposedly necessary determinations of local horizons in which the rational or advanced agency appears to be firmly anchored. The 'unanchoring or deracinating effect' of a navigation equipped with a universal orientation

becomes a condition of enablement for philosophy with regard to the choice of commitments (assertional, inferential, referential, practical, ...) and their import in the game of truths (*how far a set of commitments can go and where does it lead to?*). In other words, without this unmooring effect, philosophy is incapable of examining any commitment beyond its local implications or envisaging the trajectory of reason outside of immediate resources of a local site. Philosophy proposes analytico-synthetic methods of wayfinding in what Robert Brandom discribes as the rational system of commitments.[3] It analyzes commitments by examining what other commitments they lead to (diligently unpacking entitlements pertinent to each commitment). But it also, synthesizes collatral commitments in order to revise the initial commitment or arrive at new higher order commitments. In doing so, philosophy either decomposes a complex commitment to its constituents or bootstraps a simple commitment to a complex one that demands the liberation of new abilities for it to be undertaken and mobilized To this extent, philosophy gauges the import of commitments by taking them to their ultimate conclusions through inductive, deductive and abductive modes of reasoning. Once a set of commitments is unpacked to its ramifications or collateral commitments, it is forced to be revised or even abandoned under the asymmetrical revisionary power of its ramifications. Any commitment in this sense generates a discontinuity or what Rene Thom called a "generalized catastrophe" with regard to its present content.[4] This catastrophic change in the present commitment is retroactively administered from its future, namely, its ramifications unlocked by the philosophical navigation of that commitment. As a discipline that closely follows the procedure of commitment-making, philosophy displays a constructive adaptation to the logic of catastrophe precipitated by asymmetrical ramifications of a specific commitment into the future. It constructs an all-encompassing model for noetic and social evolution according to the revisionary and hence, discontinuous force of the future. By unmooring the present from its conserved relation rooted in the past and understanding the reality of time as freely expressed in the discontinuity of the future with regard to the past and the present, philosophy secularizes the force of the future as a force of revision. Thereby, it renders obsolete the myth of redemption as an antiquated theological curiosity stemmed from misunderstanding time, conflating or trivializing the links between the past, the present and the future, and lastly a biased endorsement of the origin over destination. But the reality of time cannot be exhausted by the origin or what has already taken place; instead, it is a destiny that forces one to revise its positions and orientations as it is being unfolded. Destiny expresses the reality of time as always in

---

3 See Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

4 See Rene Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis: An Outline of a General Theory of Models* (Massachusetts: W. A. Benjamin, Inc., 1975).

excess of the origin; in fact, as catastrophic to it. To adapt, to act in time, one ought to understand the reality of time - that is, how time freely expresses itself from the perspective of destination. Yet again this destination is not exactly a single point, it eventuates as trajectories. As soon as a manifest destination is reached or takes place, it ceases to govern the historical trajectory that leads to it and is replaced by a number of newer destinations which begin to govern different parts of the trajectory, leading to its ramifications into multiple trajectories. Philosophy sees the action in the present in terms of destiny and ramifications, which is to say, based on the reality of time. It constructively adapts to an incoming and reverse arrow of time along which the current cognitive or practical commitment evolves in the shape of multiple future destinations re-entering the horizon of what has already taken place. Correspondingly, philosophy operates as a virtual machine for forecasting future commitments and presenting a blueprint for a necessary course of action or adaptation in accordance with a trajectory or trajectories extending in reverse from the future. It discursively sees into the future. In short, philosophy is a nomenclature for a universal simulation engine. It is inside this simulation engine that the self-actualization of reason is anticipated, the escape plan from localist myopias is hatched and the self-portrait of man drawn in sand is exposed to relentless waves of revision. In setting up the game of truths by way of giving functions of reason their own autonomy - in effect envisioning and practicing their automation - philosophy establishes itself as the paradigm of the Next (computational) Machine, back from the future.

• Not only reason is able to proceed regardless of its connection to natural laws but also its regime of normative causes should be distinguished from that of natural causes. The combination of these two facts should be taken as the first indication of reason's potential for automation. Succinctly speaking, the autonomy of reason implies the automation of conduct according to reason. If we object that reason is rooted in biological and physical domains (i.e. natural laws) and for this reason, the autonomy of reason is untenable, then we must also hold that the conceptual compulsion is bound by natural impulsions (by virtue of the assertional commitment we have just made). Moreover, we can even claim that it is possible to define a complex inference or an advanced mathematical concept as well as its relations to other concepts simply by way of decomposing it to its biological roots. A claim that soon appears to be extremely precarious. The second objection against the autonomy of reason is by way of advocating a mixed-level entanglement between physical-biological and normative-conceptual horizons (cf. Giuseppe Longo). In order to adhere to this position, one should be able to exactly specify the levels which constitute the mixture in order to avoid the conceptual conflation arising from upholding a generic conception of mixture that inevitably leads to confusing different explanatory, functional and structural levels. Once the levels of the mixture are specified, we should also be able to distinguish different

concepts and their pragmatic roles on the basis of their specific levels of entanglement with physical and biological domains. Again, this will prove a precarious task that is only feasible by resorting to conceptual conflation and the over-extension of one explanatory level to another without taking into account their discontinuities and specific constraints. The third alternative would be that rational norms are conditioned by physical and biological laws via evolutionary processes but they function independently and their normative status cannot be explained by their evolutionary conditioning (cf. William Lawvere). This alternative is indeed not incompatible with the ultimate autonomy of reason anticipated by the game of truths. Reason is not the law itself but the conception of the law, in other words, it is the logic of rules and not rules themselves, it is the function not the full chain of causes. Reason is neither separated from natural laws nor is it isolated from social construction, but nevertheless it is responsible for itself, it is defined by its own irreducible needs and can only be assessed by itself. The autonomy and the automation of reason respectively lie in the asymptotic autonomy and extractability of its function. The automation of reason, accordingly, originates from the capacity of its normative function for autonomous deployment. Automation here refers not to iteration but a bootstrapping of primitive abilities to complex ones. This bootstrapping proceeds in accordance with norms, it does not proceed in spite of them. While the latter ('proceeding in spite of norms') defines iteration as a mechanical form of symbol-manipulation or rudimentary automation, the former ('proceeding in accordance with norms') outlines automation as a *ramifying procedure*, which is the programming schema of the next machine.